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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL SPEAKER DETAILS FATAH
6TH CONGRESS PREPARATIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 1087

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Palestinian National Council (PNC) Speaker Salim Zanoun, whose main office is in Jordan, told Poloff on July 6 that preparations for the upcoming Fatah 6th Congress on August 4 were moving forward. Palestinian and Israeli leaders are coordinating access for members living abroad. Several options are being studied within the PNC in the likely event that members from Gaza are prevented by Hamas from attending. Zanoun predicted that some of the "historic leaders" of the PNC would be given long-term appointments and exempted from standing for re-election. End Summary.

6th Congress Moving Forward

12. (C) Political momentum is building to hold the Fatah 6th Congress on August 4th, PNC Speaker Salim Zanoun told poloff in a July 6 meeting. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) reportedly heard separate but consistent messages about the meeting from President Obama and Russian President Medvedev, which helped to confirm the political necessity of convening the congress as soon as possible. Zanoun called the congress a "global issue" that could no longer be ignored by the Palestinian leadership and one which Abu Mazen is committed to convening.

The Issue of Access

13. (C) Access for delegates to the congress remains a thorny issue. Zanoun said that Abu Mazen is working with Israeli authorities to ensure that PNC members are able to pass through the border and checkpoint crossings. Perhaps even more importantly, Abbas is also attempting to assure the Israelis that PNC members who reside outside of the Palestinian territories will leave once the congress is over.

14. (C) On the question of delegates from Gaza, Zanoun was pessimistic about their ability to participate. He noted that Gaza residents were recently prevented from traveling to both the recent Fatah Revolutionary Council meeting and a separate women's conference. He saw both examples as signals from Hamas that they would embargo the Fatah congress as well. Zanoun confirmed that the congress would likely be delayed if Gazans could not travel, but also said that such a delay would only last a week or two at most before the congress would be forced to proceed without them. The speaker said that the PNC leadership was looking at ways to deal with the potential lack of Gazan delegates. One possibility is that elections would only be held for the West Bank members of the PNC, leaving elections for the Gaza delegates to be held at a later date. Remote voting via video conference was another option under discussion.

The Leadership Election: Potential Outcomes

15. (C) Zanon spoke of three scenarios which may emerge out of the anticipated leadership elections. First, the entire PNC could stand for re-election. Second, the PNC could stand for re-election with the exception of Abu Mazen, who would be appointed as an Arafat-style "President for life" not subject to future elections within the PNC. Third, four of the PNC's "historic leaders" (Abu Mazen, Salim Zanon, Faruq Qaddui, and Mohammed Abu Gheim) could be exempted from the electoral process while the rest of the PNC leadership would be required to stand for re-election. When asked which outcome was most likely, Zanon (perhaps exhibiting some wishful thinking) said he thought the four "historic leaders" option was most probable.

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